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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, April 26, 1932.

Subject: "Moth Proofing." Information from the Bureau of Entomology and the Food and Drug Administration, U.S.D.A.

Publication Available: F. B. 1353, "Clothes Moths and Their Control."

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A grist of questions came in after my talk with you two weeks ago on how to keep clothes moths away from stored clothes and furs and woolens. Two of these questions ask information that will be of so much general interest that I am going to answer them over the air.

Mrs. A. wrote me as follows: "My neighbor stored her heavy winter coat in a moth proof garment bag, only to find on taking it out in the fall that it had been ruined by moths. Can you tell me a safe way of storing my coat?"

Well, I referred that question to Dr. E. A. Back, the man who is in charge of federal research work to find out how to protect things in storage from insect attacks. I am going to read you Doctor Back's reply to the query. Here it is in substance as follows:

There seems to be considerable misunderstanding on the part of housekeepers as to the real function of garment bags. Now these bags are frequently called 'moth proof,' not because there are any properties in the bag which will kill moths or moth eggs, but because the bags can be closed so tightly that moths can't enter.

If you understand that fact, you can readily see that a garment stored in a so-called 'moth proof' bag will be protected against the insects only if it goes into the bag absolutely free of moths or moth eggs, and if the bag is not torn.

So if you want to use one of these moth proof bags in storing clothes, here is the proper procedure:

First, cleanse the garment by laundering in the case of sweaters and washable woolens -- or by dry cleaning woolens that are not washable. If the garment doesn't need cleaning or washing, lay it in the sun for several hours and brush it thoroughly. Moths can't live in the sunlight. A thorough brushing and shaking should dislodge any moth eggs that might be in the folds or seams. Cleaning with the vacuum cleaner attachment is an added precaution.

Now, if you have made sure by laundering or dry cleaning or beating and sunning that the garment is free from moths and moth eggs, then put it into a bag on the hanger provided for it, and close the bag. It is difficult to dislodge moths from furs, so it is best to place them in commercial storage during the summer.

But be careful in closing the bag. Sometimes bags have a zipper closing, but more often you have to fold and refold the top in order to get a tight closing, then hold the folds with clips. Whichever method is necessary to tightly close the bag you are using, give it very careful attention.

Another point to consider in using these garment bags is the manner of putting the garments into the bags. The hook part of the hanger usually extends through the opening at the top of the bag, so that the bag with its contents can be hung over a hook or clothes pole in the closet.

Now, observe that unless you close this opening, no matter how small it is, you run the risk of moths entering the garment bag and undoing all of your careful work. So seal the opening, and in placing the hanger or moving it about, be careful not to enlarge or to tear out the opening itself.

Well, there is Doctor Back's very complete and thorough answer to Mrs. A's question about storing clothing in "moth proof" bags. The bags are moth proof only in the sense that if properly handled they will keep moths out of already cleaned garments. If there are moth eggs in the garments when they go into the bags, you will inevitably get some damage.

If by any chance a few moth eggs or moth worms are in garments when they are placed in heavy paper bags that are well sealed the addition of a small amount of paradichlorobenzene crystals should kill the insects.

Doctor Back gives many other facts about storing and fumigating garments and woollens in Farmers' Bulletin 1353-F, "Clothes Moths and Their Control."

Now, for our second question. Mrs. B. writes as follows:

"I once saw on sale a preparation which, so the salesman claimed, would drive away moths or flies if a container of it were hung in a room. This looks like a simple way of getting rid of household insect pests. Could you recommend to me some such preparation?"

Well, I am sorry to say, Mrs. B. that I most decidedly cannot. I referred your question to Mr. W. S. Abbott, the man in charge of the insecticide testing laboratory of the Federal Food and Drug Administration. His reply in a nut-shell, says, "Beware of preparations claimed to disinfect the air and kill insects simply by their presence in a room."

The information that Mr. Abbott gives is so practical that I think I'll read you his entire letter. He says:

"Recent experiments conducted by the Food, Drug and Insecticide Administration of the Department of Agriculture have exploded the idea that

anti-moth fumigants are effective in rooms or closets against moths, flies, roaches, or ants. The experiments also have established that no substance will merely by its presence kill insects, purify or disinfect the air and destroy odors. Further, the experiments prove that anti-moth fumigants must be used in sufficient amounts in small tight containers in order to be effective.

"But I am not going to tell you how to kill moths, for I think you already have that information from the Bureau of Entomology. I do believe that you want to know about certain proprietary preparations that shouldn't be used; these useless preparations include such things as pieces of wood or card board that have been dipped in melted naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene and contain on one end a deposit of the material. One especially prevalent form of these useless preparations in by-gone days was cakes or crystals of naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene in cute little card board boxes or metal containers. Possibly the lady who wrote you, Aunt Sammy, had seen or heard of one of these preparations.

"Their labels generally claim, or did before the law-enforcing officers of the Department got busy, that one of these boxes or containers hung in a room will drive away all moths, roaches, bedbugs, and flies, and disinfect the room, prevent disease, and purify the air.

"We have tested many such preparations. We have not found any one of them that would accomplish the results claimed or be of practical value when used in the way directed, except possibly as a deodorizer. In all cases of this sort that have come to the attention of the Department, action has been taken under Federal Law wherever the law was applicable to bring about the correction of the statements on the label. But new products are constantly coming on the market; besides the Federal Law does not apply where a product is sold only within the State in which it is manufactured.

"Now don't mistake me. Naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene, if properly used are effective against moths. But they are not practical for the control of the other insects usually mentioned on the labels. By 'Proper use' I mean that these chemicals should be placed in sufficient quantity in small tight containers such as trunks, chests, or closets, where the gas that is given off is confined and enough gas is present to be effective in killing the moths.

"Any housekeeper who is asked to buy one of these preparations should read the label carefully, and if the label guarantees that one container will protect a room against moths and other insects, be very skeptical. On the contrary, if the label directs you to use the preparations in trunks, chests or tight closets, and also to use enough of the containers to place at least one pound of the material to each one-hundred cubic foot of inclosed space, you may pretty safely conclude that the preparation will be effective against moths. But any claim that a cake or crystal will disinfect the room or purify the air is unjustifiable. These materials are not disinfectants."

Well, there is our answer from the insecticide testing man to Mrs. B's question. I think you'll find both of these lengthy answers I've given you today contain information that will be helpful to you in fighting moths. Now, let me suggest that you send for F.B. 1353 on the control of clothes moths so that you may have a permanent record of this information.

Tomorrow: "Fitting out Wrinkles."

